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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, DRL/IRF and DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: Defrocked Monks and Dissidents Released During Tet Amnesty

REF: Hanoi 51

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In addition to former Thanh Nien journalist Nguyen Viet Chien, four defrocked Khmer Krom monks, a member of the For the People's Party and a land rights activist were released as part of Vietnam's Tet Amnesty. While we are still awaiting the release of the formal list of those amnestied by the President, through contacting a number of dissidents and family members of those jailed we have learned that none of Vietnam's most prominent dissidents currently in jail were among the 15,140 granted amnesty. Family members and dissidents estimate that this is due to new disqualifying "political requirements" instituted by the Office of the President. END SUMMARY.

Four Khmer Krom Monks Released

¶2. (SBU) Monks Kim Moeun, Danh Tol, and Thach Thuong were released on January 17, 2009 and Monk Ly Hoang was released on January 20, 2009 as part of President Triet's Tet Amnesty. Our sources have independently confirmed that all four monks have been released and are presently living at home. We understand that Danh Tol returned to Can Tho and the other three are in Soc Trang province. Monk Ly Suong was released earlier on November 21, 2008. Sources confirmed that he has been allowed to travel from home to his former pagoda in Soc Trang province but at this time is prohibited from being re-ordained as a monk. The five Khmer Krom former monks were defrocked by the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha and later convicted of public disturbance and disrupting traffic in May 2007 following a series of largely political protests earlier that year. (NOTE: Human Rights Watch released a report last month entitled "On the Margins: Rights Abuses of Ethnic Khmer in Vietnam's Mekong Delta," which highlighted the case of these five monks. END NOTE.)

Two Others Released...

¶3. (SBU) Phung Quang Quyen was released after having served more than a year of his 18-month sentence. Quyen is a member of the For the People's Party (FPP) based in Dalat. He was tried at the same time as other United Workers Farmers Organization (UWFO) activists. He was sentenced in December 2007 for "abusing democratic and freedom rights to infringe upon legitimate rights and interests of individuals and organizations" (Article 258 of the Penal Code). Quyen's sentence was upheld after an appeals trial on February 25, 2008. Also released was Mr. Dang Tien Thong after spending 9 months in jail. He is a land rights activist from Ho Chi Minh City who had previously clashed with police during a demonstration in November 2007. He was arrested in March 2008 for disturbing public order and was sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment on July 22, 2008.

... but Well Known Dissidents Still in Jail

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Although the release of journalist Nguyen Viet Chien, the Khmer Krom monks and the two others is welcome, it is

disappointing that none of the most prominent dissidents currently in jail were released, such as Nguyen Van Dai, Le Thi Cong Nhan or Father Nguyen Van Ly among others. Family members of those in jail as well as previously jailed dissidents echoed the belief that new "political requirements" such as admitting previous crimes and being a "model prisoner" were viewed as having been used by the GVN to disqualify political prisoners who would otherwise qualify for amnesty.

15. The cable was coordinated with Consulate Ho Chi Minh City.

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